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COMMUNIST PENETRATION OF LABOR UNIONS

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## INTRODUCTION

Lenin taught that Communists must be able "to agree to any sacrifice and even - if needs be - to resort to all sorts of stratagems, manoeuvres, illegal methods, to evasions and subterfuges, only so as to get into the trade unions, to remain in them and to carry on Communist work within them at all costs."

There is ample evidence that Communists have long considered Lenin's statement as a guiding principle in trade union work, and they have developed the technique of penetrating and exploiting trade unions to a high degree of proficiency.

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate how the Communists, taking advantage of conditions as they existed in a selected group of *two* countries, were able to penetrate and exploit the trade union movement for their own purposes.

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## I. GUATEMALA

A. Development of Communist Influence Labor. Prior to 1944, no labor unions other than controlled workingmen's mutual aid societies existed in Guatemala, nor was there a real Communist Party as such. The pre-1932 Communist Party had been crushed by former President Ubico, who feared an uprising similar to that which had occurred in El Salvador.

The June and October 1944 revolutions ended the 70 year era of dictatorship in Guatemala. The political, economic, and social upheavals following the revolutions gave the Communists opportunities which heretofore had not existed, particularly in the labor movement, for employing infiltration and organizing tactics.

Following the June uprising of 1944, a schoolteachers' union was founded, and in January 1945 it emerged as the Union of Educational Workers of Guatemala. A Railway Workers Union was founded in August 1945, and with other new unions it joined the Educational Workers' Union to form Guatemala's first labor federation, the Confederation of Guatemalan Workers.

The new labor federation recognized the need for experienced labor advisors to aid its development and progress, but such advisors were not available in Guatemala. This deficiency was quickly "remedied" by a group of Central Americans with Communist backgrounds who had had experience in labor organizations in other countries. They were joined by Antonio Ovando Sanchez, a Guatemalan labor organizer who had been trained in Moscow.

These persons came to Guatemala and became advisors to the new federation. One of their first acts was to create an indoctrination school, known as the "Escuela Claridad", for the ostensible purpose of training labor leaders. The Communist orientation of the school soon became apparent and alarmed the Railway Workers Union and certain other unions, who withdrew and formed another federation, the Trade Union Federation of Guatemala.

In January 1946, the government closed down the school on the grounds that the Guatemalan Constitution forbids "political organizations of a foreign or international character".

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*Communist*  
Ovando Sanchez was later quoted as saying he had begun to form the Communist Party in the Escuela Claridad.

After the closing of the school, Communist indoctrination continued through the use of Marxist "study groups" clandestinely organized within the labor movement and political parties.

A group led by Victor Manuel Gutierrez, and consisting of persons associated with the Escuela Claridad, gradually came to dominate the labor movement. Gutierrez became a member of Congress in 1946 and took part in the enactment of the Labor Code. He rose rapidly in the labor movement to become Secretary General of the Union of Educational Workers, and later of the Confederation of Guatemalan Workers itself, which took on an increasingly Communist orientation. The Confederation retained its affiliation with the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) and the latter's regional organization, the Confederation of Workers of Latin America, when non-Communist Labor unions withdrew from the WFTU in 1949 on the grounds that it was Soviet dominated.

Gutierrez's group was also able gradually to infiltrate the Trade Union Federation of Guatemala and to win it over to the Communist viewpoint, even though the Federation had been originally formed in opposition to the Communist tendencies of the Confederation of Guatemalan Workers. The Communists were aided in their work by the opportunistic ambitions of several of the leaders of the Federation.

During the years that the Confederation of Guatemalan Workers and the Trade Union Federation of Guatemala were heading toward their eventual merger, there was a further influx of Communist leaders from outside the country to advance the ideological and organizational capacities of Gutierrez and his group. In addition to these, Louis Saillant, Secretary General of the WFTU, and Vicente Lombardo Toledano of the CTAL, arrived in Guatemala in May 1951 to attend a Communist-dominated international conference of Land and Air Transport Workers, and used this occasion to work with local labor leaders for the achievement of labor unity.

As a direct result of this visit, the Trade Union Federation of Guatemala and the Confederation of Guatemalan Workers merged in October 1951 to form the General Confederation of Guatemalan Workers, the sole labor federation in Guatemala, under the Secretary Generalship of Gutierrez. In July 1951, Gutierrez, for the first time, publicly admitted that he was a Communist.

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In August 1953, the General Confederation of Guatemalan Workers formally affiliated with the WFTU.

**B. Use of Labor Organizations to Further Communist Objectives.**

The exploitation of organized labor in Guatemala for the furtherance of Communist political objectives is well established.

In 1950, a Communist-controlled political action committee was formed for the express purpose of directing labor participation in the elections. It played a prominent part in the presidential and congressional elections of that year.

In 1953, the General Confederation of Guatemalan Workers and its close ally, the National Confederation of Farm Workers of Guatemala, were formally incorporated into the "National Democratic Front" composed of the four Administration political parties.

The strength of these two organizations in 1953 has been estimated at 100,000 members. When one considers that a total of only 225,000 votes were cast in the 1953 congressional elections in Guatemala, this figure becomes significant and is indicative of the disproportionate influence which the Guatemalan Workers Party, (Communist Party of Guatemala) which numbered only about 2,000 official members at the time, was able to exercise on the national political scene.

The Communists, recognizing agrarian reform as one of the most powerful instruments available to a minority seeking state power, strongly supported the Agrarian Reform Bill submitted by the Administration to Congress in 1952. They were also instrumental in the subsequent adoption of amendments to the law which specifically provided for a predominance of representatives from the General Confederation of Guatemalan Workers and the National Confederation of Farm Workers in the local and departmental committees administering the law. Communist control of the agrarian reform movement was thereby guaranteed by the terms of the law.

In other domestic matters, resolutions of the General Confederation of Guatemalan Workers consistently paralleled and supported the themes expressed by the Party. In the international field, it supported the "peace" movement, eulogized the USSR and its policies, opposed "American imperialism", and otherwise followed the international Communist propaganda line.

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C. Communist Party Control of Labor. By 1953, the General Confederation of Guatemalan Workers had developed to the point where it represented every labor organization of importance within the country. At the same time, the Guatemalan Workers Party (Communist) was in undisputed control of the Confederation, and therefore of organized labor in Guatemala.

Party control of the Confederation was assured by the means of placing Party members, many of whom were also members of the Party's Political Committee, in all key positions within the Confederation. Thus, Gutierrez, Secretary General of the General Confederation of Guatemalan Workers, was a member of the Political Committee of the Party, and at the same time head of the Labor Union Commission of the Central Committee. Party control of the Confederation was therefore immediate and direct.

No serious challenge to the Party's leadership of organized labor was permitted. A short-lived revolt in 1952 against Communist control of a union was readily put down, and its leader was forced out of the political party to which he belonged. In October 1953, a small labor federation was formed which challenged Gutierrez to justify his international Communist connections. Gutierrez did not bother to respond, and in January 1954 the leaders of the new federation were arrested by the police and reportedly expelled from Guatemala without any charges being placed against them.

The General Confederation of Guatemalan Workers remained firmly under Communist control until the revolution of 1954, at which time its leaders fled into asylum, and the Confederation collapsed.

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## II. JAPAN

A. Development of Communist Influence in Japanese Labor, 1945-48. Prior to 1945, although weak underground organizations existed, Communism was not a strong Revolutionary threat in Japan, for any Communist manifestation was promptly suppressed by the government. The government was only slightly more tolerant of Socialism and of Socialism and trade unionism.

After the defeat of Japan, U.S. occupation policy encouraged democratic ideas and organizations and trade unionism was established as an essential principle of democracy.

In many respects the Communists <sup>took</sup> ~~were in the best position~~ to take advantage of the new opportunities. As students of Marxism-Leninism, they recognized the importance of capturing the trade unions to further Communist objectives, and their theoretical training had equipped them to organize and lead trade unions.

<sup>with</sup> The deteriorating economic situation in Japan between 1945-47, <sup>and 1948,</sup> was accompanying unemployment, inflation and food shortages, created "ideal" conditions for the Communists to exploit. While other fronts were not neglected, their principal target was the trade union movement on which they concentrated their efforts. Their superior discipline and organizing ability enabled them to forge ahead of others for the control of the trade union movement, and by early 1946 they were entrenched in many of the new trade unions and were rapidly expanding their influence.

Apparently confident of their ability to dominate the entire trade union movement, the Communists issued an appeal to the Socialists for the formation of a single trade union federation in the latter part of 1945. The Socialists, fearful and suspicious, rejected these advances, and in August 1946 formed their own movement, the Japan Federation of Labor (SODOMEI). No to be outdone, the Communists, working openly and through secret members in various unions, and through fellow-travelers and dupes, established a second federation, the Congress of Industrial Unions (SANBETSU), which it proclaimed as a "coalition of the most progressive trade union forces." It repeatedly denied that it was Communist-controlled.

During the latter half of 1946, a number of strikes and demonstrations occurred, due to the worsening of economic conditions. The Communists were quick to exploit these strikes and to expand them into larger strikes and giant demonstrations. At the same time, they appealed for trade union unity and for a united political front to overthrow the government and establish a "People's government".



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The effective and vigorous Communist leadership had its effect on members of SODOMEI; pressure for unity with SANBETSU increased, aided by Communists working both openly and secretly inside SODOMEI unions. Faced with the danger of secessions, the anti-Communist leaders who controlled SODOMEI engaged in a tactical maneuver. They rejected a full merger with SANBETSU, but agreed to the formation of a joint council, ZENROREN, for consultation on common problems. It was not what the Communists had in mind, but it represented a step forward in their efforts to establish control over the entire trade union movement.

ZENROREN subsequently became the Japanese affiliate of the World Federation of Trade Unions after the visit to Japan of a WFTU delegation headed by Louis SAILLANT in March 1947.

During 1947, the Communists intensified their unity campaign and were helped by a number of domestic factors, among these being the growing factionalism in the Socialist Party, the disillusionment in trade union ranks, and the still deteriorating economic situation.

Communist advances became more and more of a problem to SODOMEI, which found itself faced with a growing inability to hold its ranks against the expanding influence of SANBETSU. In what was essentially a defensive move, SODOMEI withdrew from ZENROREN in August 1947.

By mid-1948 there were approximately a million and a half members in SANBETSU. By infiltration and subversion the Communists were exerting an ever increasing influence over SODOMEI unions, and were well on their way towards controlling the entire Japanese labor movement.

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**B. Decline of Communist Influence in Japanese Labor, 1949-52** By the end of 1948, there seemed to be no limit to Communist ability to expand in the trade union movement. However, anti-Communist forces began to mobilize slowly and hesitantly in 1948; they gathered force, and during 1949 produced a dramatic and swift reversal of the Communist tide.

A number of factors were responsible for the Communist reverses. The Communists no longer enjoyed the benevolent tolerance of occupation authorities, who became more outspoken in ~~its~~ <sup>their</sup> exposure and denunciation of Communism, particularly in the trade union field. The Japanese government also began to take counter measures. Another factor was the improved economic situation brought about by American aid. Inflation was brought under control, and Japanese production started on the road to recovery. At the same time, the purge of Japan's pre-war leaders came to an end in 1948, and gradually some of the most able and vigorous political leaders, government officials, etc., returned to their former professions and added their weight to the fight.

Inside the unions themselves, a growing revolt against Communist control was taking place, and efforts were made to replace Communist policies with more democratic socialist conceptions. The movement was organized in part by those who had consistently fought the Communists, partly by rank and file workers who began to rebel at the incessant strikes now that the economic situation had improved, and partly by former Communists and fellow-travelers who had become disillusioned.

The anti-Communist leaders in SODOMEI and in the Socialist Party also gave their support to the rebellion inside SANBETSU, and began to issue calls for the formation of a new trade union federation free from Communist domination.

In 1950, the Japan General Council of Labor Unions (SOHYO) was formed. Socialist in philosophy, its constitutional convention declared that it would concentrate on economic goals, would not be an instrument of any political party, and would be anti-Communist in principle and in policy.

Within a few months, most of the unions in SANBETSU and SODOMEI had affiliated with SOHYO, leaving SANBETSU an empty shell, which it has remained ever since. In 1954, SANBETSU numbered less than 30,000 members.

Several years were to elapse after the formation of SOHYO before the Communists could regain their influence in the labor movement.

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C. Re-Emergence of Communist Influence. Eased out of control of the trade union movement in 1950, and faced with growing hostility and isolation which made it difficult to operate openly, the Japanese Communist Party resorted to placing the greatest emphasis on the secret infiltration of SOHYO, its affiliated unions, as well as the unaffiliated unions, in an effort to regain its lost influence.

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This required careful recruitment and selection of those chosen to carry out this type of work, skillful placement of secret party members, or those who had not been openly identified as Communists, and the use of fellow travelers, particularly among the Left Socialists.

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Patiently and secretly the Communists gradually succeeded in establishing such persons in a number of key positions in SOHYO and in certain strategically important unions.

The success of this tactic began to be noticeable by 1952 when union policy statements, slogans, propaganda, strikes and demonstrations, began increasingly to show <sup>increasing</sup> evidence of Communist influence.

The first major indication of their successful infiltration came on 1 May 1952. What SOHYO and Socialist leaders intended as a peaceful May Day demonstration was converted by strategically placed Communist squads into an anti-American riot, accompanied by violence and bloodshed.

During 1953-54 Communist influence in SOHYO had reached the point where many of the positions taken by SOHYO on political and economic questions paralleled the line of the Japanese Communist Party. Among these were designation of the USSR and Communist China as "peace forces", calling the United States "monopoly capitalist warmongers," and labelling labelling the United States as the aggressor in Korea, a complete reversal of SOHYO's previous denunciation of North Korea as the aggressor.

While SOHYO, which numbered three million members in 1954, has veered far to the left under the leadership of its pro-Communist Secretary General, Minoru TAKANO, it is too early to state that the Communist Party is again in control of the trade union movement in Japan. The re-emergence of Communist influence has not been uncontested, and since 1953 reaction to this infiltration has developed rapidly both inside and outside the trade unions, and has gathered force.

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